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National Guard Bureau Public Affairs

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NATIONAL GUARD ON-THE-RECORD TELEPHONIC MEDIA ROUNDTABLE

MAY 05, 2021

TOPIC	SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS
Healing Highlights of the National Guard – Guard Reaches 10 Million Shot Milestone	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Army General Daniel R. Hokanson, Chief of the National Guard Bureau▪ Air Force Maj Gen James Eifert, the Florida National Guard adjutant general. His Guard members have made significant contributions to the fight against COVID.▪ Air Force Maj Gen Steven Nordhaus, the National Guard Bureau’s director of operations. His team has overseen the Guard’s response efforts since COVID began.▪ Air Force Maj Gen Jerry Fenwick OR Army COL Larry Fletcher, director of the National Guard Bureau’s Office of the Joint Surgeon. His team has been instrumental in the Guard’s vaccination efforts.▪ Army SSG Shavonne Santiago, a Massachusetts National Guard combat medic, who recently vaccinated her grandmother. She has some unique observations about supporting this mission.

Background:

National Guard vaccination teams surpassed 10 million shots administered to people in the communities where they live and serve. They are responsible for meeting 10 percent of the President’s goal for vaccinating the American population.

Opening Statement:

I’m General Dan Hokanson and I want to thank you for the opportunity to update you on the National Guard’s continued efforts to defeat COVID-19.



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National Guard Soldiers and Airmen recently vaccinated our 10 millionth person. That's 10 million moms, dads, grandparents, friends and neighbors our Guard members administered lifesaving shots to in the communities where we live and serve.

As I speak, almost 2,200 Guard members are giving over 135,000 vaccines a day at 805 static and mobile sites across the country. They are a part of the 32,000 National Guard Soldiers and Airmen – over 7% of our force -- who continue to support vaccination efforts, food banks, testing and screening sites, and other COVID-related missions.

Wherever and whenever the National Guard is needed, our people left their jobs and families, to serve their communities. I'm very proud of the compassion and commitment our National Guard men and women have demonstrated throughout this response.

We are also grateful to our DOD, state and federal partners who have been in this fight with us to defeat COVID-19. It takes a whole-of-government approach to achieve the results we've seen.

I also want to take a moment to acknowledge the 20,000 National Guard, and thousands of other DOD and partner-country service members, who are serving in harm's way overseas today. Make no mistake, the investment America has made to ensure the National Guard is ready for its combat mission, is paying dividends in our homeland response. More than ever, the National Guard remains ... Always Ready, Always There.

Dialogue:

[Name]

[QUESTION/RESPONSE]

Maj. Matt Murphy

Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us for our media roundtable. We'll take a second just to make sure everyone has good comms. Thank you for joining us for our media roundtable: National Guard reaches 10 million shot milestone. I am Air Force Major Matt Murphy and I will be your moderator today. Army Gen. Daniel R. Hokanson, chief of the National Guard Bureau; is joined by Air Force Major General Steven Nordhaus, the director of operations for the National Guard Bureau; the adjutant general of Florida, Air Force Major General James O. Eifert; and Army Staff Sergeant Shavonne Santiago from the Massachusetts National Guard. This roundtable will last approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Just as a reminder, questions should be focused on the Guard's vaccination efforts. If you have other questions for the General and his guests outside of this focus, please send them to the media desk. We only have time for one question each, so please ask your



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best question first. With that, I will now turn the time over to General Hokanson,

GEN Daniel Hokanson

I thank you and I know folks have a pretty busy schedule today, so I'd like to get over some opening remarks and really get to any questions that you have, because we have some great folks here. And also we have Major General Jerry (Doctor) Fenwick, who runs our Joint Surgeon's office, he's really been involved in this since the beginning.

[Opening Statement]: I am (Army General) Daniel Hokanson and I want to thank you for the opportunity to update you on the National Guard's continued efforts to be to defeat COVID-19. National Guard Soldiers and Airmen recently vaccinated our 10 millionth person. That's 10 million Moms, Dads, Grandparents, friends and neighbors in the communities where we live and serve.

As I speak, almost 2,200 Guard members are giving 135,000 vaccines a day at 805, both static and mobile, sites across the country. They're part of about 32,000 National Guard Soldiers and Airmen, over 7% of our force, who continue to support vaccination efforts, food banks, testing and screening sites, and other COVID-related missions.

Looking back, it was over a year ago on March 5, 2020 that a California National Guard Pave Hawk crew delivered COVID test kits to stranded passengers aboard the Grand Princess Cruise ship. Today, those same helicopters and crew members are serving overseas supporting the warfight. Since that first mission in March of last year, National Guardsmen and women have served over 7.6 million days dedicated to COVID support. Wherever and whenever the National Guard is needed, our people leave their jobs and families to serve their communities and nation, I'm very proud of the compassion and commitment of our National Guard men and women and what they've demonstrated throughout this response.

We're also grateful to our DOD, state and federal partners who have been in this fight with us to defeat COVID-19. It takes a whole of government approach to achieve the results we've seen.

I also want to take a moment to acknowledge the 20,000 National Guard members, and thousands of other DOD and partner-country service members, who are serving in harm's way overseas today. Make no mistake, the investment America has made to ensure the National Guard is ready for



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its combat mission is paying dividends in our homeland response. More than ever, the National Guard remains -- Always Ready, Always There.

And since we've already introduced our other guests, I'd like to thank you again for joining us. And we look forward to any questions you have.

Maj. Matt Murphy

Thank you, General Hokanson, I'd like to go ahead and start off with Lolita Baldor from the *Associated Press*.

Lolita Baldor, AP

General, thanks for doing this. I have one question. How long do you see this mission continuing? Is there any sense that it appears to be slacking off in some states? Are you shifting around to deal with those shifts? And just a very brief second, what is your sense of the number of National Guard members who have been vaccinated? Can you give us a picture of that? Thank you.

GEN Hokanson

So Lita, thank you for the question. When I look at the missions, we actually don't know how long that they're going to go. Obviously, when you look at the number of vaccination stations we have around the country, we will continue to support those, but as the numbers continue to go down or they become more available in the other markets or other organizations, we will be there as long as we're needed, but not longer than we're needed. Also, we look at some of the other missions that do require support -- the food banks, logistics support. We work very closely with our governors to determine the length of the mission. And we'll continue to do it as long as we're needed.

With respect to the number of vaccinations, I'd say generally over half of our Guardsmen are vaccinated and we continue to work on that. And, of course, we drill one weekend a month. So that number fluctuates every month, depending on our drill schedule. We continue to monitor that very closely.

Maj. Matt Murphy

We'll take the next question from Luis Martinez, *ABC News*.

Luis Martinez, ABC News *General, good to see you and everybody else. Just following up on Lita's question. As we're seeing some states scaling back individually, the National Guard mission is going to have to adjust accordingly, based off what the governor states. Is there something, across the board, the National Guard is recommending to states about as far as they draw back; whether it's prudent, whether they should be following CDC guidelines, or ultimately, is it just really up to the governor to determine how their Guardsmen are going to be used? Thank you.*



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GEN. Hokanson

We hand you over to (Air Force Major General) Steve Nordhaus, he's our Director of Operations.

Maj. Gen. Steven Nordhaus Sir, thank you very much for the question. Yes, it's up to the governors throughout the states, as they know the best fit within their state. From the beginning, this has been federally funded, but locally supported and managed. Because at that point of need at the local area, they know what's best. What we're seeing from the states is just like we've seen throughout this response -- the states will increase or decrease based on the needs of their citizens and at the direction from their governor; supported from their adjutants general. We do have General Eifert (Florida Adjutant General) on the line. Maybe you would like to add comments about what you're seeing from the state of Florida?

Maj. Gen. James Eifert, Thank you, Spock (Nordhaus's call sign). This is General Eifert, the TAG of Florida. I can tell you our current status: we have about 2,000 Guardsmen on duty right now. They're entering the middle of their 14th month of this no-notice deployment, basically away from their employers and families. They've been supporting the governor since the beginning of this pandemic. Right now, we're mostly supporting vaccines and a lot of testing. We are also supporting logistics readiness centers, and every manner of other mobile vaccination and mobile testing team the Department of Emergency Management in Florida can throw at us. So we're still really busy. We're anticipating some drop off in the vaccine demand within the state. And as that demand signal diminishes, we expect the governor will probably look to release our forces back to their families and their employers. But at this point, we don't have any specific schedule of decreased tasking for our National Guard.

Maj. Matt Murphy

Thank you, Generals. We'll go ahead and take a question from Eleanor Watson, *CBS News*. Nothing heard. We'll go to Ellie Kaufman from *CNN*. Nothing heard. We'll go to Lillian LaCroy from *Fox News*. Nothing heard. Amanda Macias from *CNBC*. Alexa Corse from the *Wall Street Journal*.

Alexa Corse, WSJ

Hi, Alexa here. I wanted to ask about the strain on the Guard; dealing with this massive COVID response, in addition to social justice issues and all the other things you've dealt with. And do you have a sense of how much the COVID mission has cost?

GEN. Hokanson

That's a great question when you look at the impact it's had on our organization. If you look at last year, actually on June 6th, we had 120,000 National Guardsmen on duty -- that was really our peak. And that's the most



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we've had mobilized since World War II. That was really the confluence between the peak of our COVID-19 response and also our civil disturbance operations. When we look across the board, we have met every one of our requirements. Every single one of our overseas deployments we were able to meet on time. We conducted our training, and we also met every requirement the governors have asked us to do.

With respect to the total cost, I don't know the exact number. I'll hand that to General Nordhaus shortly, but what I'd really like to do is have Staff Sergeant (Shavonne) Santiago give you a quick perspective from somebody who is on the ground helping, and talk about that impact. So, Sergeant Santiago, if you don't mind joining in, please.

SSG Shavonne Santiago

Not at all, sir, thank you. To answer your question, Miss Corse, in regards to the possible strain that this mission is putting on the soldiers: I would have to say not much, to very little at all. For the most part, we all volunteered to be here. We volunteered for this mission, with a very good understanding on the severity of the situation. I mean, not just our country, but our world is in this pandemic -- and it's still very much active. So to be able to get our boots on the ground to administer as many vaccines as possible to help save lives, and get our communities back, and get back to our families. There's an incredible amount of passion that is brought into these buildings, and into these soldiers, and into the patients that come and see us. So I would say very little strain, and much more pride and compassion.

GEN. Hokanson

Thank you, Shavonne. Spock, anything you want to talk about the funding?

SSG Santiago

Sir, I don't have exact numbers on the funding, so we'll have to take that up. Major Murphy, if you'll take that so that we can get back to Alexa with the answer.

Maj. Matt Murphy

Yes, sir. With that, we'll go ahead and move on to Melissa Stewart from the *Reserve and National Guard Magazine*. Melissa, do you need to unmute? We'll go ahead to Howard Altman from *Military Times*. OK. Nothing. We will go to Libby Howe from *Defense One*.

Libby Howe, *Defense One* Hi there, no question. Thanks.

Maj. Matt Murphy

Thank you. And moving on, we'll go to *WUSA Channel 9*. Nothing. Will go to *NBC News*. OK, I think we've gone through everybody. Does anyone have a follow-up question?



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Abraham Mahshie, *Washington Examiner* *This is Abraham Mahshie, the Washington Examiner, on the telephone line. I'd like to ask a question for General Hokanson. Obviously, this 10 million number is a really positive news story -- a lot of goodwill generated. It comes on the heels of an announcement that a fourth service member from the Wisconsin National Guard was arrested related to the Capitol riot. So is that affecting the goodwill and the positive reputation that the Guard has across the country? I wonder, General, if you could speak to that? Thank you.*

GEN. Hokanson

When you look at the positive impact we've had across the nation, and I can't really comment on any law enforcement or pending investigations, but in any organization, the goodwill of the majority and vast majority of those and what they're doing in their communities, I think it has had a really positive impact. And so we really try and do everything we can within the National Guard to support not only our nation when it comes to our war fight mission, but also our communities and anything our governors or communities need to really make a difference. We really like to focus on that, and make a difference whenever and wherever we can.

Tracy O'Grady-Walsh

Hey, this is Tracy O'Grady here, we specifically invited Florida to join us here because we believe they were the first state in our entire nation that was able to open up vaccines to 100 percent of their citizens. Florida, can you talk to us a little bit about the logistics of being able to open up earlier than anyone else?

Maj. Gen. Eifert, FL TAG It's a big team effort, from everyone in our county health departments, our civilian retail partners, and all of the different pharmacy stores and grocery stores everywhere. We're (the National Guard) just a small piece of that overall team puzzle, really. We do a lot of the logistics response for the state, though, with our logistics resource center in Orlando, where we've been basically managing a lot of the distribution of resources, PPE, and test kits, and that kind of thing throughout the state. So that's a big part of what we played. Mostly, we really assist our contract nurses and emergency management and county health department personnel with the actual data gathering and logistics support for the vaccination response. We're just supporting them in the different walk-up centers and drive-through centers, and mobile testing busses that we have every imaginable way to get out into the community to both our long-term care facilities and our under-served populations -- we're just a part of the big team. Florida has vulnerability, because a significant part of our population is elderly. We've been all-in on just helping the governor, and the Director of Emergency Management, and



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the state's Attorney General, and getting to every person that could possibly want a vaccine.

Maj. Matt Murphy

Perhaps we could have Major General (Jerry) Fenwick speak to the overall operation picture with all of the medical staff.

Maj. Gen. (Dr.) Jerry Fenwick, NGB Surgeon General

Thanks for allowing me to answer some questions. I would like to say, as a physician, just how proud I am of all of our National Guardsmen and women for their tireless work literally over the last year-and-a-half. The work they've done really can't be understated. Early on, our office began efforts to coordinate with all 54 states and territories to design both static and mobile vaccination teams. This occurred in concert with our testing abilities and our testing teams and in agreement with the state medical leadership. Our state surgeons, we allowed and encouraged them to tailor these mobile and static vaccination teams to meet the needs of the missions -- and that included both large cities, rural areas, and underserved populations. I should note; we allowed and encouraged the expansion and contraction of these facilities in order to tailor make to the demand signal. So we've been very successful in this, as noted by the number of vaccinations we've given.

Maj. Matthew Murphy

Thank you, General. Luis Martinez from ABC. You had a follow up question?

Luis Martinez, ABC News

Yeah, I have two actually. One on Florida, because we're now approaching the new hurricane season again. Given the resources that you've had and continue to provide, how are you going to have the available resources to meet the hurricane season? And then a follow up to NGB: the question about the maintenance of health care professionals, doing the vaccinations in some states. Has there been a drag, as far as you've seen, impacting the civilian sector, or was it just a force multiplier in many of these states?

GEN. Hokanson

Gen Eifert, I'll hand it over to you first to talk about the hurricane season.

Maj. Gen. Eifert, FL TAG

Yes, sir. So we're laser focused right now, which is a blessing, as we look at the potential for us to start downsizing our COVID mission. As I mentioned, with the long deployment, over a year-long that our Guardsmen have already been on, we're letting them off just in time to reset and get ready for hurricane season. In fact, this week, we have our hurricane exercise going on within our state, so that we're recalibrating our readiness and retraining our people to be ready for hurricane season. And we're hoping to have a lot more Guardsmen off COVID duty as we prepare them all to respond (to



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hurricanes). In the case of a big hurricane season, we're prepared for it. We're looking at it hard. We're hoping for the best -- with the improving COVID situation, we won't be in a scenario where we're trying to work both missions simultaneously.

GEN. Hokanson

Related to your second question about the merit of our health care professionals, I'll hand it over to General Fenwick, as a doctor himself. We stay in very close contact with our adjutants general -- they really have the pulse for the communities from which they draw their medical professionals from. They find that balance. We're very careful not to overtax the health care system, while best utilizing medical professionals for the entire community. That said, let me hand it over to Jerry Fenwick.

Maj. Gen. Fenwick, NGB SG Thanks for the question. You know, so far we have not seen significant degradations in the civilian health care sector from our folks actually providing the vaccinations. I should note that obviously the vast majority of our providers and our health care folks come from the civilian sector. So as we as we move toward some of the missions that's decreasing, particularly with vaccinations, we'll probably be able to coordinate more efforts to try to get these people back in the hospitals, if they need to be. I should note also that we keep in very close contact, as General Hokanson mentioned, with our state surgeons, our state Air surgeons, and our state medical leadership. And we have weekly calls with this group of people and ask them this very question: do you have enough resources and are you seeing any degradation in facilities or any degradation in the ability to provide the mission? And so far, it's always been positive.

Maj. Matt Murphy

Perhaps, Sergeant Santiago, can talk about your colleagues in regard to that question?

Maj. Dyana Allen

I'm sorry, Mr. Murphy, just to let you know, our team here in the Pentagon has to drop off. And General Hokanson, did you have anything that you wanted to add from your side?

GEN. Hokanson

I really want Sergeant Santiago to give her perspective, because I think it's really important here. Unfortunately, we've got Congressional engagements, so I've got to go. But, thank you all for the questions and for the opportunity to share this very important milestone and the support for National Guard across the country. It's Guard men and women trying to find that balance between their civilian career, their military career, and their family. But all of them standing up, making a difference, when they know what's really going to be helpful to their communities. So thank you, Matt. We're going to drop



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off, but I'm certain Santiago's got some great experience she'd love to share with everyone.

Maj. Matthew Murphy

Thank you, sir. Appreciate your time. Sergeant Santiago.

SSG Santiago

Over on our end, we have a plethora of medical practitioners here, so we have an OIC (Officer-in-Charge) who's a physician. He has his own practice in internal medicine. His Captain is also a PA (Physician's Assistant), he's on our team as well. We have a critical care nurse. We have myself, as a medic. So we have a lot of very good individuals here. So as numbers have increased, and we needed larger teams, we recruited other individuals who are outside of the medical practice or outside the medical field, such as MPs or even engineers. That said, it's incredible how quickly we could get classes like CLS and other EMT classes up and running to train these soldiers and give them the capabilities to keep up with the rising numbers of vaccinations being given. So whether they are able to be hands-on with their vaccines, or screening patients, or drying up the medications, or documenting all their information in the computers -- wherever we need them, it's incredible how quickly we're able to find and train them to keep up with the demands.

Maj. Matt Murphy

Thank you, sergeant. General Eifert, do you have anything to add about the medical personnel in your state?

Maj. Mat Murphy

No, not unless there are any further questions for me.

Maj. Matthew Murphy

OK, I just wanted to double check at Mosh Gaines, are you on the line, *NBC*, did you have any questions?

Lolita Baldor, AP

Hey, Matt, can I ask one other question?

Maj. Matt Murphy

Yes, ma'am. Go ahead.

Lolita Baldor, AP

I'm wondering if you have heard from many of your other TAGs in and around the hurricane region. Are they also starting to look toward the shifts to the hurricane season? Are any of them still sort of overwhelmed with COVID? Are seeking help for the hurricanes? What is the general sense of the entire region?

Maj. Gen. Eifert, FL TAG

That's a good question. You know, the last time I saw other TAGs was about a month and a half or two ago at our first in-person conference. So with COVID, we've all been kind of operating out of our own little fiefdoms and not as communicative as we would normally be. So I actually haven't spoken



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to any of them recently about hurricanes. We just finished an All-Hazards conference that is not attended by the TAGs, but by our domestic ops representatives and our joint staff. And they've been working effectively, as they always do every year, to create a game plan where states can offer one another assistance through what's called Emergency Management Assistance (mutual aid) Compacts. Through what we call EMAC agreements, we look internally at the problems that we have for this coming hurricane season. For example, in Florida, I have almost 2,000 soldiers that are going to be deployed overseas for a variety of different missions, primarily in the Central Command area. That means I may have some vulnerabilities within my formation that I will need other states to help out with. So through these All-Hazards working groups, we talk about what our needs will be based on degrees of hurricane activity. Something like a Category 4 or CAT 5 hurricane, will certainly require Florida to request assistance through these EMAC agreements with other states. In the past, we've had support from as far away as Alaska. Believe it or not, if they had the resources that were most suited for whatever missions that we had needs for assistance. So all the TAGs get briefed after those All-Hazards working groups on what is available through our neighborhood to be able to assist one another in the case of a serious emergency in our state. So that's been going on as scheduled, and I haven't gotten the full out brief on the details t, but I'm anticipating that everybody's going to be pretty able to support one another -- assuming we don't have another significant spike or increase in cases and responses that are required by the Guards in the region. But I think we're looking pretty good, especially in Florida. We're anticipating some off-ramping of our commitment in our domestic response arena. I expect if another state needs us, we'll be able to assist them.

Maj. Matt Murphy

Thank you, General. We'll go ahead and open it up to all the media on the line if you have another question.

Alexa Corse, WSJ I'll jump in. Alexa, with the Wall Street Journal here. Is there a goal to get all eligible Guard members vaccinated or to hit a certain threshold? Is there a timeline?

Maj. Matt Murphy

General, if you could address that about your state.

Maj. Gen. Eifert, FL TAG

There is no mandatory requirement for Guardsmen to get vaccinated or for anybody in the Department of Defense to get vaccinated, for that matter. So it's a completely voluntary, personal decision as to whether Guardsmen accept the vaccination. Every one of them is already, especially my state, eligible to receive that. Those who want them, have already gotten them.



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Those who may want them in the future, but are still on the fence can get one whenever they want. So other than that, until the president makes a decision, and the Secretary of Defense decides to make the vaccine mandatory, it will continue to be an individual personal decision by the Guardsmen like it is for everyone else in the country.

Maj. Matt Murphy

Thank you, General. Sergeant Santiago, can you talk about the feelings from yourself and maybe some of the discussions you've had with your colleagues about it?

SSG Santiago

It's not mandatory for us. However, we are out here and we're vaccinating individuals. So for us on our end, it's important to understand and respect and trust the science of the vaccine. That way, we can properly educate those in the community and reassure them in their decision to be vaccinated.

Maj. Matthew Murphy

Thank you, any further questions from the media that are on the line? Hearing none. Sergeant Santiago, since you're still out there, do you have any final remarks?

SSG Santiago

I do not, Maj. Murphy, but thank you for having me.

Maj. Matt Murphy

Thank you. And General Eifert, do you have any closing remarks?

Maj. Gen. Eifert, FL TAG No, happy to talk to the press. And thanks for sponsoring this roundtable, appreciate it.

Maj. Matt Murphy

And to all of our media colleagues, thank you so much for your time. If you have any follow up questions, please feel free to send them to the media desk or give us a call. We'll be sure to answer any additional information that we can provide. We really appreciate your time. Thank you for joining us today and have a great afternoon.